DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 688 FL 007 722

AUTHOR Woodruff, Margaret
TITLE Integration of the Total Physical Response Strategy into a First-Year German Program: From Obeying Commands to Creative Writing.
PUB DATE Apr 76
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the spring conference of the Texas chapters of the American Association of Teachers of German (North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, April 3, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Games; College Language Programs; Communication (Thought Transfer); *German; Grammar; Higher Education; *Instructional Innovation; *Language Instruction; *Reading Comprehension; Reading Instruction; Reading Skills; *Second Language Learning; *Teaching Methods; Vocabulary Skills; Word Recognition
IDENTIFIERS *Total Physical Response Strategy

ABSTRACT

An experimental first-year German program at the University of Texas is described. The course builds on and extends psychologist James Asher's Total Physical Response strategy and is based on five principles: (1) presenting language as communication in context; (2) teaching recognition before production; (3) postponing demands for error-free production until a high level of comprehension is reached; (4) presenting grammar as an aspect of meaningful communication; and (5) using German as the language of instruction. Reading is taught by emphasizing skills of prediction and inference and familiarity with vocabulary and structure to enable students to sight-read German effectively. Vocabulary and structures are retained better if used in classroom games and activities that help fix the words in the mind. Students show recognition of language before they are able to produce it by acting out instructions, illustrating vocabulary or identifying parts of speech. Production of error-free sentences is not stressed initially, but homework and lab exercises are designed to lead to this. Grammar is learned primarily by inferring principles from actual usage. A survey favorable compares the performance of program students after one semester with regular program students completing a year of German. (CHK)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED126688

FL

Integration of the Total Physical Response Strategy Into a First-Year German Program: From Obeying Commands to Creative Writing

(Paper presented at the spring conference of the Texas chapters of the American Association of Teachers of German, April 3, 1976, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas, by Margaret Woodruff, Instructor of German at the University of Texas at Austin)

Building on and extending psychologist James Asher's Total Physical Response strategy into a complete first-year university language course, members of the Department of Germanic Languages at the University of Texas at Austin have developed a German program for all 23 sections of the first-semester course and all 15 sections of the second-semester course. This program is based on five principles:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

1. presenting language as communication in context;
2. teaching recognition before production;
3. postponing demands for error-free production until a high level of comprehension is achieved;
4. presenting grammar as an aspect of meaningful communication;
5. and using German as the language of instruction.

The research on which the program is based, including Asher's work, is described in the Annual Review of Foreign Language

FL007722

Education for 1974 and 1975, particularly in "A New Reading" by Janet King, Freda Holley and Betty Weber of the Department of Germanic Languages at the University of Texas at Austin[1] but also in "Learning Theory for the Classroom Teacher" by John B. Carroll.[2] Janet King is a nationally known reading expert; immediately after completing her ACTFL chapter, in summer 1975, she designed the first-year German program for the University of Texas at Austin, which is still in its first experimental year. The primary goal in this program is reading comprehension, to be achieved by a variety of means. We have incorporated into our program any technique that seems to work, regardless of what "method" it originally came from. We have tried, however, to be precise and consistent about our objectives --our expectations of the students--and not to test anything we haven't taught.

I. Presenting Language as Communication in Context

Reading is basically what we have added to Dr. Asher's Total Physical Response strategy; and not just added it, but used the Total Physical Response strategy to make the reading

---

[1]Chapter 6 in Perspective: A New Freedom, vol. 7 of the ACTFL Annual Review of Foreign Language Education (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1975).

[2]Chapter 5 in The Challenge of Communication, vol. 6 of the ACTFL Annual Review of Foreign Language Education (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1974).

program work, and vice versa. We want to develop the skills, such as prediction and inference, and the familiarity with vocabulary and structure that are necessary for students to be able to sight-read a German short story or magazine article effectively, before demanding error-free spoken and written production at a similar level of complexity. We want the students to rely on their own basic vocabulary, small though it is at the beginning, and on their reasoning ability to figure out what a given story is probably going to be about, or what a given word has to be in the sentence in which it is found--rather than expecting to translate every word that is not familiar with the aid of a dictionary.

We face the same problems of motivation and attention that any language teacher faces. We're emphasizing solving the problem by creating a classroom context in which language is learned as a vehicle of genuine communication--not as something that can be put through rather abstract substitutions and transformations of isolated sentences.

Students learn better if they are actively participating in class; yet the standard audiolingual drill, while better than no participation, leaves something to be desired. Structures can be internalized as effectively through the repetition in properly constructed game-like activities that involve communication of information as through pattern drills, and with better motivation and attention.

For example, with objects available in the classroom such as a book, a woman's purse, and a pencil, gender can be drilled informally by holding up a book and asking, "Is that the pencil?" The students answer "No, that's the book." Accusative case can then be drilled by having students hide objects behind their backs and other students guess, "Do you have the purse? the pencil?" Dative case and the verb "to belong to" can be drilled if one object is collected from each student's pockets or purse and the class has to guess "does that belong to you? to that student? to her?" And more sophisticated versions of the guessing game are easy to think up for more advanced levels.

Fortunately, creating a realistic context for communication in German also helps solve another problem all foreign language

teachers face: how to help students memorize vocabulary efficiently. Various studies indicate that memorization occurs more efficiently if the items to be learned are linked in some meaningful sequence, rather than isolated or simply paired with their English equivalents. Pictures and visualization help considerably; learning words in the context of stories and performing actions, such as carrying out commands, are also most valuable.

In addition, it seems that novel and humorous situations, such as those that arise quite naturally in command and simulation activities, help fix words in students' memory. Sometimes only one exposure to the word is required. For example, one of our teachers told how something fell from a scaffold in a construction project outside the classroom. Everyone rushed to the widows to see what was going on. The teacher commented casually: "Something just fell from the scaffold." The word scaffold appeared in a story the students read four or five weeks later and the whole class knew the word, because something

had happened earlier to focus their attention on this word in a really memorable way. We try to create these memorable situations in the classroom; and we don't even have to try, after a while: the group creates them for itself.

To accomplish our primary goal of reading comprehension, and fluency, we have students practice all skills--reading, writing, listening and speaking. We test primarily listening and reading comprehension in the first semester, however. On the standard MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Tests, our listening scores after only one semester were very close to the national norm for the end of the first year. For reading they were also quite close, particularly at the median and the lower quartile.

We also found a 20% increase in the number of students that we retained for the second semester, an increase over the number that we retained in the previous year, when we did not use this method. Moreover, the reaction of the students to the course--the overall assessment of the course--improved. On a scale in which 0 is "average" and the range is -2 to +2, our ratings rose from .3 ("average") to 1.0 ("above average") between fall 1974 and fall 1975, when the experimental program began. In

the same period the students' assessment of teaching effectiveness also rose, from .9 to 1.5, that is, from "slightly above average" to between "above average" and "excellent." (See attached summary.)

In the second semester we are testing some writing and expecting some production of correct present and past tense forms, as well as testing listening and reading comprehension. Students spend considerable time speaking in class, and they are eager to do more, as they indicated in the evaluations at the end of the first semester and also in midterm evaluations that some of us conducted in the second semester. Students also like very much acting out stories; creating situations; solving problems, as in Dr. Asher's film; free dialogues; and the more creative writing assignments, such as describing their own daily schedules, planning a trip in German, or writing poems. We were surprised and pleased to find that they do better on the more creative writing assignments. If you ask them to do a relatively simple exercise that is closer to a standard drill, they turn up with more errors than when they do something they can get personally involved in, even if it appears to be more complicated. When students are communicating something about themselves, they not only communicate more effectively, but

they also write and speak better German, with fewer errors.

Additional references on presenting language as communication in context:

James J. Asher, "The Learning Strategy of the Total Physical Response: A Review," Modern Language Journal 50, 2 (February 1966): 79-84.

B. R. Bugelski, "The Image as Mediator in One-Trial Paired-Associate Learning: Sequential Functions in Serial Lists," Journal of Experimental Psychology 103, 2 (1974): 298-303.

John W. Oller, Jr., and Dean H. Obrecht, "The Psycholinguistic Principle of Informational Sequence: An Experiment in Second Language Learning," IRAL 7, 2 (May 1969): 117-123.

Carlos Alfredo Yorio, "Some Sources of Reading Problems for Foreign-Language Learners," Language Learning 21, 1 (1971): 107-115.

II. Teaching Recognition before Production

As Dr. Asher has pointed out, recognition or comprehension seems to be a natural first stage before production of a language. Taking this natural sequence into account seems eventually to lead to more efficient recall and production, when the students are ready. Although students are certainly active while learning

under our approach--by physically demonstrating comprehension of what they hear and read--they are not producing German at the same rate at which they are learning it. Some researchers feel that interference occurs when repetition or recall and recognition are attempted simultaneously. Practice is not the same as learning. Delay of demands for production until comprehension is achieved is believed to prevent this interference and increase learning as well as preventing frustration, which is a valuable goal in itself. Only after recognition has been thoroughly taught and confirmed through simple responses are our students expected to produce their own sentences. About the end of the second week students start to speak, beginning with simple commands, but only if they feel ready. At the beginning of the semester we had told them, "OK, we're going to tell you what to do. You play our game for a while and then you can tell us what to do." It works well: they show remarkable creativity in combining and varying the commands given earlier by the instructor, to produce interesting situations in the classroom.

What do our students do to show comprehension, if they are

not speaking at the same level at which they are understanding, but just letting the language patterns sink in?

1. They obey commands and pantomime, as in the Asher films.
2. On daily homework assignments and weekly tests, they--
   a. Draw pictures or match words to pictures or to related words. Often they draw before-and-after pictures or cartoon strips based on the stories they have read.
   b. Select the appropriate item--such as multiple choice of the correct question word--wer, wo, wohin or woher--that a specific phrase answers.
   c. Circle or underline all words in a certain category, to show grammar recognition--for example, underline all parts of the verb in the sentence, because, of course, they will misunderstand half the sentences they read if they fail to notice the verb at the end.
   d. Copy into a list all words in the reading text having to do with a given vocabulary category, such as school or politics. The students can make such identifications

long before they can produce the verbs or give a precise English equivalent of the words. They have learned to get a feel from the context of how words fit into a sentence grammatically (what part of speech the word must be) and of what semantic field words must be in. As Dr. Asher has pointed out, students' minds work very fast, and in the past we've been slowing them down by staying at the level on which they can produce an error-free form of the foreign language. Performing these preliminary activities not only allows students to demonstrate comprehension, but also reinforces the learning that has already taken place.

At the beginning, students make physical responses and simple verbal responses, such as their names, yes, no. When students feel ready to write and speak, they are encouraged to do so and are given as much reinforcement as possible for their attempts. Indeed, they are expected to speak after about the second week of class, but errors that do not prevent communication are accepted. Accurate production is demanded and tested only after comprehension is well established--beginning in the second

semester with simple present-tense sentences, and increasing only gradually.

From the first day, students are given printed syllabi consisting of the vocabulary for the commands and questions practiced in class. In the fifth week they begin reading short stories accompanied by pictures. When students are well into the reading phase they also enjoy composing dialogs for basic situations, as Asher's students do in some of his films, as well as pantomiming stories they have read and later acting them out, using a little dialog. They also enjoy participating in informal class discussion of their own daily life and plans, for example, describing their daily schedule or weekend plans.

Additional references on teaching recognition before production:

James J. Asher, "Children's First Language as a Model for Second Language Learning," Modern Language Journal 56, 3 (1972): 133-139.

Leon Jakobovits, "Implications of Recent Psycholinguistic Developments for the Teaching of a Second Language," in Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar, 2nd ed., ed. Mark Lester (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), pp. 245-268.

Harris Winitz, "Problem Solving and the Delaying of Speech as Strategies in the Teaching of Language," Asha 15, 10 (October 1973): 583-586.

III. Postponing Demands for Error-Free Production

Production of error-free sentences is not stressed even in the second semester, but from the beginning of the course many of our homework and lab exercises are designed to lead the students into error-free production. The students are not under much external pressure to avoid errors because we hope that as they become interested in German they will feel self-directed pressure to speak more like native Germans. Accurate production is encouraged gradually through simultaneous use of intensive and extensive reading assignments. If the students can get the main idea of the story as a whole, that's fine. With the intensive paragraphs, we work on identification and transformation of verbs and similar tasks. Janet King has been writing our labs, designing tasks that will teach students to hear contrasts of minimal pairs, copy accurately, and take dictation accurately. Through these slide-and-tape programs in the language lab one day a week, students learn accuracy incrementally, proceeding by small, carefully planned steps. We introduce important contrasts, such as wo/wohin, in the appro-

priate contexts. Meanwhile, effectiveness of communication is the main criterion for judging production in the first year. We correct "global" errors--errors that actually interfere with communication, such as saying "ich bin gut, danke" ("I'm good, thanks") instead of "es geht mir gut"("I'm fine"). We usually don't correct local errors--errors that do not interfere with communication. There is growing evidence that reading and aural comprehension depend less than we had thought on control of morphological details, such as case endings, and it is primarily comprehension at which we aim. When a student says something that wouldn't make sense to a native German, we stop and find out what the student is trying to say and help him say it correctly. This happens rarely; generally we spend class time eliciting responses and reinforcing them. When students make local errors, we either ignore them or repeat the sentence correctly without comment (the student says "er gehen nach Hause," we say "ja, er geht nach Hause").

We encourage and even insist on inference and prediction because such techniques are crucial to efficient reading.

whereas some of the morphological details are not. A general comprehension should precede a comprehension of every detail. Precision is less important and can wait. Moreover, the desire to achieve accuracy on the part of the student has been shown to be dependent on motivation. Dr. Asher and some of the audience spoke last night about students who had decided on their own that they were ready for conventional learning of correct forms. When they are ready, we give them the information and practice that they need. We work with them in our office hours, direct them to the language lab for out-of-class practice, refer them to pages in their textbooks that contain the forms they need to learn. Meanwhile, however, we feel that our time is better spent in demonstrating that German can be validly used for interesting communication and that the Germanic cultures are worth exploring, than in premature and rigid demands for accuracy.

Here is the strong point of the American Association of Teachers of German summer camp for high school students in

Junction: students see German used for communication in everyday life. A relaxed and happy classroom atmosphere should prevail, in order for production by the students to be encouraged. Speaking German must seem natural and obvious to them, and having teachers use German for classroom instructions and announcements and informal friendly greetings to students helps make this possible.

Additional references on postponing demands for error-free production until a high level of comprehension is achieved:

M. Kim Burt and Carol Kiparsky, "Global and Local Mistakes," unpublished paper (Language Research Foundation).

Freda M. Holley and Janet K. King, "Imitation and Correction in Foreign Language Learning," Modern Language Journal 55, 8 (December 1971): 494-498.

IV. Grammar as an Aspect of Meaningful Communication

Since we want to show the students that language is for communication in a personally meaningful context, we do not ask for isolated sentence transformations. Both in class drill and in testing, any German sentence used is clearly part of a

discussion or description or dialog or story. Moreover, grammar is presented as an aid to understanding: students learn what they need in order to understand the text.

Our attitude is that teaching first-semester students <u>about</u> grammar is rather like teaching someone to play baseball by conducting a seminar on the theory of contacting the ball with the bat. It's interesting, but discussing this in detail is more appropriate for advanced students. One takes beginners out on the field and gives them the ball and the bat. We do this, not only figuratively but almost literally, because we actually use balls in the classroom to elicit student responses. The students hardly suspect as they throw balls around the classroom and talk casually with the teacher about what they are doing that they are transforming statements to questions, dependent to independent clauses, present tense to past tense in a game that is really rather like a standard structure drill.

We try not to waste students' time by teaching them rules that they don't need to accomplish our goals. We have been careful about outlining behavioral objectives, about knowing

what we want and teaching to accomplish these goals. Adult speakers of English have already acquired a large portion of the grammar of German, whether they know it or not, and we try to emphasize transference of this grammar and deemphasize interference from English. We believe that, far from wasting students' time in required German courses, we're teaching them techniques of inference and speed reading that will carry over into their reading English and other foreign languages and be useful to them throughout their lives.

The textbooks used in our first experimental year have been: first semester--Roland Schäpers, Deutsch 2000, Band I (München: Hueber Verlag, 1972)
Guy Stern and Everett F. Bleiler, Essential German Grammar (New York: Dover, 1961)
second semester--Roland Schäpers, Deutsch 2000, Band II (München: Hueber Verlag, 1973)
Essential German Grammar (above)
Irmgard Feix and Ernestine Schlant, Junge Deutsche Prosa (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974)
Robert Spaethling and Eugene Weber, Literatur I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972)

Essential German Grammar is used only as assigned outside reading; there is little to no conventional grammar discussion in class. We design our own homework exercises because we do not know of any textbooks that have the kind of exercises we want. We use our textbooks only as readers, not for the drills

in them. We are working toward a massive reading program, under the theory that the more the students read, the better readers they will become. We are planning to change some of the textbooks, and feel that our approach is adaptable to almost any existing textbook or system, but that some books are better than others for our purposes.

The students do quite a bit of reading--about one chapter or story per day--but they are not expected to master every detail of the text. We occasionally encourage students to infer the most important grammar principles from the examples in class commands and in the stories that they read. But primarily we create situations and exercises in which the students will use German: read, speak, write, and listen; and show comprehension in such ways as carrying out commands or drawing pictures.

Additional reference on presenting grammar as an aspect of meaningful communication:

Leonard Newmark and David A. Reibel, "Necessity and Sufficiency in Language Learning," in Readings in Applied Transformational Grammar, 2nd ed., ed. Mark Lester (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), pp. 220-244.

V. Using German as the Language of Instruction

Studies indicate that when German is the language of the classroom students learn more German. One of the benefits of starting a first-year program with commands that manipulate the behavior of the students along the Asher model and practicing those until the commands are thoroughly learned is that the teacher then has a basic repertoire of instructions for classroom activities that can be used throughout the student's years of German study: go to the board and write on it, put your chairs in a small circle, open your books, look at the teacher, go sit down next to Carol, and so on. Moreover, these commands make it possible to stay in German throughout the class hour from the very beginning of the course, except for a five-minute period at the end for questions in English.: Our tests and the syllabi that are given to the students, sometimes so detailed that they seem more like lesson plans, are in German, including all instructions. Thus teaching assistants are given the vocabulary that they need to conduct a class entirely in German, including instructions and most announcements.

Additional references on using German as the language of instruction:

Janet K. King, "A Reading Program for Realists," German Quarterly 42, 1 (January 1969): 65-80.

Janet K. King, "The Use of Audiolingual Techniques in the Third- and Fourth-Year College Classroom," Foreign Language Annals 2, 2 (December 1968): 185-194.

I. Comparison: Department of Germanic Languages, University of Texas at Austin: first-semester course (German 406) students at the end of the first semester compared with a random sample of colleges whose students had one year of German

--Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Tests: German, Form LA (Educational Testing Service)

	LISTENING		READING	
	Other college norms, 1st year	UT norms, 1st semester	Other college norms, 1st yr.	UT norms, 1st sem.
No. students	394	329	515	349
No. colleges	19	1	28	1
Range of raw scores	7-45	8-42	3-50	5-47
Mean raw score	20	18	23	18
Standard deviation	8	6	10	7
Upper quartile	25	22	29	21
Median	19	18	21	17
Lower quartile	15	14	15	14
SCAT-V mean	309	305	308	305
Standard deviation	13	10	13	10

II. Comparison: ENROLLMENT

	1974-75	1975-76
1st sem. (406) fall	429	398
spring	187	175
2nd sem. (407) fall	132	98
spring	238	287

III. Comparison: Course-instructor surveys (sections taught by teaching assistants only)--average rating given by students

Scale: -2 to +2 (0 = average)	Fall 1974 23 sections taught by t.a.s of 24	Fall 1975 16 sections taught by t.a.s of 21
Overall rating of course	0.3 (average)	1.0 (above average)
Overall rating of teacher	0.9 (above average)	1.5 (between above average & excellent)

Data from U.T.-Austin Measurement & Evaluation Center, Mar. 8, 1976